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The Future Is For Priests

Return to Hope

Religious Conventionality





## U.S. Pastoral Council

Last November, an eloquent appeal was made at the meeting of the American Catholic Bishops, for a National Pastoral Council. The plea was made by Father Patrick O'Malley of Chicago, able president of the National Federation of Priests' Councils. His very appearance at the meeting was a rather unique event, and was a significant early step towards the exercise of greater co-responsibility.

"We as priests," remarked Father O'Malley "are asking for a share not only in the implementing of programs for the good of the Church, but in the planning and decision-making for that Church. . . . In effect, we are asking that the first steps be taken to form a national policy-making board which will involve as much as is possible the total Church."

It is cause for elation to learn officially that the Advisory Council to the bishops is "now studying the feasibility of establishing a National Pastoral Council." And it is equally encouraging that Cardinal Dearden recently lent his leadership and approval to the project both in his address to the bishops and in a press conference afterwards. The Cardinal has already led the way towards wider participation by his own admirable and total reorganization of Church affairs in Detroit. He heartily commended those bishops who, alive to the realities of our world and to the directives of Vatican II, have established various participatory agencies for priests, religious and laity in their dioceses.

The Cardinal is convinced that in the varying challenges presented to the institutional Church there are many hopeful signs. He has heard the many voices who cry out that decision-making must become more personal; involving more of the faithful; more flexible and up-to-date. The prelate contends that such reforms "will make [decisions] more readily acceptable"; "bring enriching insights"; "create greater harmony and love of the Church"; and help the bishops to be "more effective shepherds of the Church." Perhaps America will catch up with Holland and West Germany in establishing this promising venture.

JOHN T. MCGINN, C.S.P.

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# The Future Is For Priests

Msgr. John J. Egan

## *STRONG ROOTS AND PROMISING EXPECTATIONS*

There must be a time when the demands for honest expression of thoughts and feelings, and the need for listening with an open heart coincide. Today must be one of those times. You asked me to speak with you because of my position in the Association of Chicago Priests, and also, I presume, because you have some trust in my person and experience.

I accepted because I respect you and your collegial grouping under the banner of the Young Priests' Caucus. Neither your invitation nor my acceptance presumed approval of your organization, program or tactics.

Nonetheless, I am heartened by the initiative which brought your group into being and thus far, it appears to me in the few months of your existence, you have acted responsibly and forthrightly in addressing yourselves to some of the important issues affecting priests and the people of God in our Archdiocese.

Obviously, I come from a different generation of priests. I am putting no qualitative weight on the word "different." We were men of our time, of our world and of the Church we knew. We were in the last days of the great and pervasive first generation of immigrants. It was a world on the verge of convulsive change which came with a rapidity too profound to comprehend, and too vast to absorb. Only the strong and secure were able to effect the necessary changes within themselves and move ahead to creative and constructive growth.

In the 40's and 50's we were filled with an euphoric trust that the "golden age" of peace and the unity of One World was

upon us. Had we not weathered the bitterness of the Depression, and the ugliness and slaughter of World War II? Nothing could prevent now the eradication of poverty, disease, hunger, war; and the peaceable change of the liturgy, the improvement of political and ecclesiastical structures, the upgrading of education and the rest were underway.

In Chicago, it was a Church of constant growth and hopeful development. It was also a Church of favoritism and power. It was a Church of pride and achievement. The brick and mortar days only came suddenly to an end with the buildings of Quigley South and the Queen of All Saints Basilica . . . and that but a few short years ago. Money and prestige, oftentimes, were truly the coins of the realm, and the title "Monsignor" was coveted as supposedly a sign of priestly achievement.

While the atom bomb and the eventual announcement of Vatican II brought to an end the placid, onward progress of both the world and the Roman Catholic Church, the 40's and 50's were memorable years for the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Has the Church in America produced another priest comparable to a Hillenbrand who read so well the times and its signs in the late 30's and acted and taught with

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*Msgr. Egan is chairman of the Association of Chicago Priests. This talk was delivered to the Young Priests' Caucus of Chicago.*



such precision and clarity? His advanced theological insight, innovative mind and personal magnetism motivated an entire generation of priests, religious and laity to initiate the string of labor schools, the Catholic Labor Alliance, the Cana Conference, the Young Christian Workers, the Christian Family Movement, the Catholic Interracial Conference, the National Conference on Religion and Race, the Office of Urban Affairs, the host of community organizations in our city, and the beginnings of honest inter-faith relationships.

### TRUE GREATNESS

Will we again see the likes of a Cantwell in Housing and Race Relations, a Higgins in Labor, a Cooke in Charities, a Mahon in Spanish work, a Quinn in training young workers, a McManus in national education, a Killgallon, Weber and Stone in catechetics, a Voss in marriage work, a Hill in priests' organizations, a Greeley in social sciences, and a host of other priests, religious, and laity too numerous to mention? The heritage is a rich one—too soon forgotten, but as Chardin is often quoted:

"... There is only one real road; it is to build the future. It's perfectly simple, but there are still so many people who behave as though the past were interesting in itself, and treat it as only the future deserves to be treated."

Too few men were given the privilege that I had in those days. I visited approximately 250 rectories in my quest to sell the Cana and Pre-Cana Conferences and, subsequently, Community Organizations. In those visits I listened to and learned from the wisdom of the older priests, now nearly all dead, who built our present churches and whose strength and zeal kept their immigrant people close to them and to the Church. I also came to admire the devotion, brusqueness, pleasant humor and co-operation of the associate pastors on whose help I depended and who like myself were fashioned in an old Church of unquestioning obedience and domineering authority.

These are the priests—all friends of mine—who have turned against the ACP—its goals and its programs, and who are appalled and angry at what they consider your

brashness, irreverence, and independence.

But so much of the understanding of the present and the interpretation of what is to come in the world and in the Church, rests in your hands and in your attitudes and actions. We had heroes in our days. Yours has to be a collective heroism—forged in struggle, misunderstanding and fear. Do any of us have the needed courage, fortitude, and holiness to grapple with the problems and the processes to bring about some amelioration of these problems which will stretch out and increase until the end of our lives?

Today I understand the vision of a Cardinal Suhard who thrilled us in our seminary days with his strong words about a new world coming into being, and urging us to try to be equal to the challenge which that "new world" would lay upon all the people of the earth.

### LOOKING FORWARD

Of the work which lies ahead, two unfinished tasks of monumental importance immediately present themselves. Unquestionably, the strength of the Church must be revamped. This is not to be done only to suit our individual and personal needs, but, please God, so that the climate can be assured for all the people of God to find freedom and healing.

As Eugene Kennedy in his latest book says so well:

"The structures of the Church should support and express the functions of service to man. If the structures do not help the Church to carry out these functions effectively, they must be modified or put aside so that the Church can get on with its real business. The institutions cannot take precedence over the persons they are meant to serve. The Church is not a club jealous of its rules and membership. It is rather the home of man. Everything it does must help him to understand and become himself as truly as possible. It is quite clear that institutional reform is demanded when the structures of the Church obstruct rather than facilitate its task of helping man to search, to work, and to love. It is a renewed feeling for the importance of this service which is the impulse of renewal in our day."



Many Church leaders today fear the prospect of losing control over people. The times and the religious reform of Vatican II demand that they immediately accept collegiality as the structural dynamic of our age. The Christian people must be engaged in active responsibility for the Church's mission of service in this world. Patience and great trust will be needed, but only in this way will vitality return to the Church and effective leadership be developed and assured.

### NEW MINISTRIES

We, as priests, must be men who are confident enough to listen to the voice, suffering and problems of our world. Unfortunately, we are partly men, in that we have recognized to some degree our identity, as distinct individuals, but we are not yet fully men, because we have not taken upon ourselves independent responsibility for the situations in which we are confined. In terms of our priesthood this means beginning to assume the responsibility for devising ministries which best fulfill our common insights into the needs of our time and people.

Apart from the structural reform which is slowly and painfully underway, more importantly, a new understanding of Christian life is growing within the Church, but no structural accommodations have been made to bring this new understanding into the mainstream of Church life. As a result, the role of the official Church in religious development is marginal, and the two processes—of religious growth and of ecclesiastical change—are going in divergent paths. As this continues, the processes are becoming polarized, neither lending nor receiving the assets of the other. As the gap widens, the hostility increases; and there will be bigger and noisier confrontations between clergy, laity and hierarchy.

The danger is not so much in the conflict, as in the loss of hope and interest among those engaged in religious reform, and their loss to the Church. This includes not only the departure of priests and religious from active ministry, but the loss of laity who no longer find the Church responsive to or even conscious of the needs

of their Christian lives. It seems to me that the challenge to creative ministry breaks through precisely at this point. If changes begun at Vatican II and continuing within the Church are deeply significant in terms of faith, how can any of us pursue them without getting involved in religious change ourselves, and attempting to share that development with others?

And do we not then have to accept the responsibility for being change-agents within the Church—an active vocation of leadership which will require the construction of new forms for the discharge of our mission, even at the expense of conflict with ecclesiastical authority? Is not this a necessary part of the pastoral task today?

If "construction work" and even constructive conflict are a part of the pastoral ministry today, one caution should be applied. We saw in Chicago recently how destructive a change-agent can be. The "Weatherman Group" did not change the existing order in any measurable way, but they did manage to so becloud the public understanding of dissent that every successive reform movement for some time will have to fight against the added prejudice of their actions.

### OUT OF LOVE

The point is that, only if we first love the Gospel, the Church and the people we serve, will we be able to create new forms that will serve and endure and then wed them to the life of the Church. There is no room in such a process for smugness, or the self-righteous conviction that we are the new elect, the *avant-garde*.

Whatever the Church becomes during our years of ministry will involve its development both in matters of faith and in matters of structure; they are, finally, interdependent as long as we are a Church. Most of all, right now, the Church has need of expertise and insight that is so thoroughly saturated with intelligent love that it will be able to guide both developments in cooperative growth.

This challenge lies before young priests particularly. What we need most is not simply catalysts; what we need is a hard core of men who are resilient and responsive



enough to move out into the new worlds of ministry and yet form a spiritual link which feeds back that new life into the Church.

We need priests who do not believe that accurate criticism is, in itself, insight—that a man has fulfilled his responsibility to his community or his profession when and if he can most tellingly uncover its inadequacies. We need priests today who will not “hedge their bets,” protecting their persons and future against the day of some imagined total collapse of Church structure. We need priests who won’t tire on the way and will have the balance to keep their sense of humor and sense of proportion. We need priests in Chicago today with your energy and talents to build new inter-faith and ecumenical structures from the wreckage of today’s inter-faith collapse.

### *TOMORROW’S PRIESTS*

Men who will cast their talents and time behind the new Center for Pastoral Ministry to help us to re-tool intellectually and spiritually for the years ahead. Men who will demand, with others, that our people who are poor can no longer exist in our society without adequate medical care; men who will interpret to middle-class white parents the agonies of their children in their feelings of alienation; men who will inspire their people to build community organizations to serve the needs of all. Men who patiently attempt to understand the profound meaning of the Black revolution and will respond to it with the dignity of servants and friends. Men on fire to amass the technical know-how and people power to change the iniquitous housing shortage in our city, men who will fight for the hungry until they are fed and will do all of this with courage and civility.

I sense among both priests and people a hunger. The words for it are old-fashioned and sometimes beclouded with a history of

abuse. But I think there is a hunger for some affirmation of the holy, some sign of a spiritual foundation, a source for the energy we all need if we are to build and create a Church or a world governed by love. Simply put, the times and the problems demand holy men—priests who live faith-filled and prayerful lives.

An accurate analysis of our problems, trained expertise, and adequate programs are all necessary. But they will not come to life unless some vision larger than simple reform charges them with its energy. The Church cannot be built up by technicians, nor can people be served always by expert pastoral ministers. In the long run, we cannot be saved only by love—love that cares enough to apply the skills of experts and technicians, but love that never substitutes those tools for the healing we need.

### *MEETING NEW CHALLENGES*

The deepest challenge to priests today is to be the men who do truly care, and from that caring draw the energy and imagination to truly serve. To be such men, we must know most clearly what we are about. We must understand our commitment as being not first to the ebb and flow of structures or events, but first to living out the way and the truth of Christ.

Finally, to quote Father Kennedy again: “You and I, like every other man, will find our future when we find again the meaning of our life, and this is precisely the gift that the Church has for the human race. It cannot give it if it remains defensive; it will not give it unless it suffers death to the outmoded forms whose burden has sapped it of so much vitality. A resurrected Church arises even now, a People of God with fresh hope and love for the human family that has been waiting to hear the Good News for a long time.”

# Return to Hope

Michael Maher

## *A NEGLECTED VIRTUE RETURNS TO CENTER STAGE*

At a time when people speak seriously about the 'death of God', and when 'post-Christian atheism' is a fact which must be accepted in many parts of the western world that were formerly Christian, the Fathers of Vatican II began their Constitution on the Church in the Modern World by asserting that 'the joys and the hopes' of the men of this age are the 'joys and the hopes' of the followers of Christ. But the document goes on immediately to remind us that these 'joys and hopes' are mixed with 'griefs and anxieties'. When many within the Church mourn the passing of the 'good old days', others, the young and hopeful in particular, are convinced that the golden age lies ahead, and that the power to bring it into being lies in their hands. Within the Church there are those who think that the condition of the Church of Vatican II is very similar to that of the Church of Corinth which was divided by the personal allegiances of those who were for Paul, or for Apollos, or for Cephas. There are others who are glad to see the monolithic block break up, and they are glad to welcome Paul, Apollos and Cephas when they offer an assortment of wares from which they can choose.

The excited buzz of those who clamour for wholesale abandonment of the old-time practices has almost drowned the sombre murmurings of those who look on in honest bewilderment and wonder where renewal is going to end. While the spectacular successes of science and technology attract men's attention and prepare them to believe in any -ology except theology, even the

casual observer can notice that behind the veneer of traditional religious practice there lies hidden an unexamined territory of half-faith and half-belief. Many who express themselves on religious matters assert that Christianity has become too isolated from real life and human problems, that it has become a system in the place of Christ, that it is too speculative and doctrinal to be relevant in the modern age. So they opt out in order to follow some new prophet who happens to be advocating his own brand of 'Christianity without religion'. Surely the Church has her share of those 'griefs and anxieties' which are mingled with man's 'joys and hopes', and neither the prophets of doom nor the apostles of hope are short of topics for discussion.

Fortunately, at this moment when the situation of Christians in the world is for many ambiguous, if not absolutely chaotic, both Catholic and Protestant theologians — who, incidentally, owe a great deal to atheists — have directed their attention to hope. Perhaps it may very well have been the almost hopeless situation of present-day believers that was the occasion of their return to this virtue, which is necessarily connected with faith, and which was always characteristic of the People of God as we

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*Through the courtesy of "The Furrow," August, 1969. Father Maher is a Missionary of the Sacred Heart. Address: Mount Merrion Avenue, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, Ireland.*



know them from the Old and New Testaments. But the return to hope is not simply a return to a God to whom we can entrust our problems in a moment of insecurity, at a time when many have lost their sense of direction and purpose. God will not miraculously solve our immediate problems, but our Christian faith and our knowledge of God's intervention in the past assure us that there is hope for the future. Vatican II was optimistic about this future which man must prepare for himself, and having praised the 'public and private institutions dedicated to bettering the conditions of human life' the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World went on to say: 'We can justly consider that the future of humanity lies in the hands of those who are strong enough to provide coming generations with reasons for living and hoping'.

### CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM

But it has been suggested that many theologians of the Vatican II period take a too optimistic view of modern man, whom they consider a decent sort of chap who must not be too harshly judged even if he does make a few disastrous decisions. Some of them have tried to argue the devil out of existence and seem to ignore that the evils formerly attributed to his machinations seem not only to survive but even to flourish. Dr. Martin E. Marty, a University of Chicago Divinity professor, speaking at the American Fifth National Workshop for Christian Unity, said that some Catholic renewal has been extreme in its embrace of the secular world, and that although the world is the workshop of God, many renewalists are guilty of pure romanticization of the secular. The same idea is contained in the response made by Robert McAfee Brown to the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. Having registered appreciation for the document's approach to the world he felt obliged to enter a *caveat*. He writes: 'There is a danger that in the laudable desire to affirm the world, the document may affirm it too uncritically'. He refers to a 'temptation throughout the document to assume that the gospel crowns the life of natural man, rather than being, as well, a challenge to, and judgment upon that life'.

Such remarks should warn us about the possible ambiguity that may lie behind statements like that of J. B. Metz, a Catholic theologian, who writes that 'the attempt to understand theology as anthropology is an important achievement of contemporary theology'. Of course it is readily admitted nowadays that Catholic theology has insisted too much on the 'vertical dimension' of our relation with God, that our spirituality has been very much a matter of '*solus homo cum solo Deo*'. Many agree that the 'horizontal dimension' was passed over too lightly, that the fact that we must acquire salvation in and through human society was not stressed sufficiently. But in any effort to right one form of imbalance there is the ever-present danger of swinging to the opposite extreme. In our case some of those who have set out to right a wrong seem in their enthusiasm to have robbed God of his transcendent and independent reality, so that God may be for them little more than a collective term for the yearnings of the human heart and the capabilities of the human mind.

### IT HAPPENED BEFORE

One encouraging thought about the present confusing situation within the Church is that it is not entirely new. Ever since Abraham accepted God's invitation and promise, and left Ur of the Chaldaens to follow him, the People of God have gone on their way in the light of an obscure faith, believing that God could and would be faithful to his word. Abraham's journey was essentially a risk, an adventure undertaken on the basis of a divine word that was just as open to doubt as is our faith. Moses, on hearing God say 'I shall be with you' (Exod. 3:12) accepted the difficult mission of leading the People through the desert to the Promised Land, although he was quite aware that this involved insecurity and danger. While on the journey to the Promised Land and even when settled down there the people of the promise often felt that God's promised help was absent, and that the God who had promised to be with them had in fact deserted them.

It was a constant embarrassment for the Israelites that the Pagans could mockingly



ask: 'Where is their God?', and that no convincing answer could be found. Their God was invisible and intangible. He had hidden his face. But the people knew that he was with them and that he would intervene on behalf of his chosen people when a converted Israel allowed him to do so. The prophets taught their countrymen to wait with patience, and they forbade them to trust in any man or in any earthly power, or to act as if God and his promises did not exist.

### *SERVING NEIGHBOR*

Today when so many complain about the formalism, ritualism and lack of human interest in our religion, it is interesting to consider what Amos had to say to his eighth century contemporaries. He abused his wealthy countrymen who tolerated or even caused a glaring contrast between extremes of wealth and misery. These wealthy people were very 'religious' and most scrupulous about the ritual demanded by their 'religion'. But long before Our Lord or St. John stressed the point, Amos drew attention to the impossibility of loving God without loving one's neighbour. The 'religious' man, who apparently trusted in his wealth, could not be satisfied with just telling the oppressed man to bear his troubles and to trust in providence. Hope can never be presented as a matter of counting on God's help. The man who hopes co-operates with God in providing for himself and for his future, and insofar as he can for others who cannot provide for themselves.

The case of Isaiah is instructive for us today. His people's faith crumbled in the face of Assyrian might. They thought their God was dead, or at least that he had been displaced by the more powerful gods of Assyria. So they ceased to offer him prayer and sacrifice and trusted rather in diplomacy. They developed a practical atheism like the men of our day who think that science and human progress have ousted God. They had nationalized their God and linked him with their plans, just as many Christians today consider God a kind of patron saint who can be relied on to go along with man's plans, and to step into the breach if these plans fail.

The problem to be faced today is much the same as that which Isaiah had to solve. In both cases we see a practical atheism resulting from the death of a god. The god who was dead according to the Israelites was 'our god', localized by the Israelites themselves. Our modern death-of-God proponents say that it is the God 'out there' who is dead, and who had been localized 'out there' by man's imagination. The occasion of Israel's doubts was the appearance on the scene of Assyrian power. Our modern Assyrian power is the tremendous advance of science. When his fellow-countrymen wavered, Isaiah stood firm in his faith in a spiritual and transcendent God who ruled both Israel and Assyria, and who could not be limited by either. With his faithful followers he hoped in this God and looked forward to a future manifestation of his power. The modern believer, while using his capacities to decide his own and the world's future, must accept and adore and trust in the same transcendent God. And just as Isaiah pointed out that obedience to this God had to be manifested in ordinary human relationships, in dealing honestly with everybody and in showing compassion for the poor and the oppressed, so can the modern theologian show that the 'veritical dimension' of faith cannot be correct unless man's relations with his fellowman are in order.

### *WHAT IS ESSENTIAL?*

The crisis which stunned the contemporaries of Jeremiah and the attitude of the prophet to that crisis may have some lessons for us in our present moment of crisis and doubt. When Jerusalem was captured and the nation destroyed, the old national religion to which every citizen paid at least lip-service was gone. When the Temple and the cult which had been the external support of religion disappeared, the prophet had to face reality and was not tempted to retain old values by closing his eyes to new truth. He knew that the old cult and sacrifice were not essential to Jahwism. But he confidently urged the individual Israelites who were sunk in the despair of national catastrophe to trust in Jahweh who was still master of the situation, however unbe-



lievable that might seem. Like Isaiah, Jeremiah knew that it is only when man is fully aware of his inability to save himself, when he ceases to cling to any human sources of hope, only then can man fully trust in God. When the situation in which he lived could lead to nothing but despair and gloom, Jeremiah could write lines of hope and consolation and he could assure his audience that in the future new covenant Jahweh could purify and save his people, and even rule over the whole world (Jer. 31: 31-34).

### GROWTH MEANS CHANGE

Today when conventional Christianity has lost its grip in many places, when social practices and public opinion bring less and less pressure to bear on him who chooses to ignore traditional forms of religion, like Jeremiah the Church must be ready to adapt her practices and organization to the felt needs of the hour, and to make an effort to relate the ideals of today's society to fundamental Christian values. The Church is faced with a formidable task, and if her approach to the problems of our times is not to be merely suspicious and negative, she needs to believe and hope in the God of Jeremiah who is still alive and with his people.

The growth of the Old Testament shows that the inspired authors continually reconsidered and reinterpreted old biblical texts, deepening and spiritualizing their theology, and assimilating new elements into the religion of Israel. In this way they were able to solve new problems arising from new political, intellectual and moral situations. They saw in past history a clue to the understanding of the present and found in the fulfillment of past promises a basis for the hope that the future would bring a solution to the difficulties and anguish of the present. The religion of Israel was a living thing, and it could not be allowed to fossilize in a dead letter. New promises replaced those that remained unfulfilled, new hopes followed the dashing of old ones, until the Messianic hopes, the highest expression of Israel's expectations, were finally realized in the person of Jesus Christ, although they were realized in a

manner that disappointed and bewildered the Jews.

A. Gelin seems to have perfectly described the hopeful and forward-looking attitude of the Jewish people when he writes: 'It [the people of the Old Testament] was a people moved by a religious impulse impelling it always one stage further, rethinking on a more spiritual level what in the first place it had lived and thought in a way less worthy of God. The Old Testament is the history of continual forward movements; a novitiate, a growing spiritualization.' The people of the New Testament are also a pilgrim people and they should be characterized by the desire to be continually moving 'one stage further'. Christians should always be rethinking their way of living and thinking so that they may surpass anything in their lives that may be 'less worthy of God'. We are always in a novitiate learning more about God and man and about the relations that should exist between them. The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World freely admits that the Church has in the past 'profited by the history and development of humanity' and that 'from the beginning of her history she has learned to express the message of Christ with the help of the ideas and terminology of various philosophers' (44). The Church today must also be prepared to profit from the modern development of mankind, and she must courageously accept new ideas and terminology that may be able to lead mankind a step further on the journey to God. This she can do while avoiding the utopian optimism about which some people warn her.

### NEW HORIZONS

The Christian can never be satisfied with the *status quo*. He is never pleased with simply being; he must always be becoming, going on to something new. Christians are the new 'children of the promise' (Rom. 9:8); they are 'those who have hope' (cf. Eph. 2:12; 1 Thess. 4:14). The message they have received from Jesus is essentially a message of hope, the good news of a kingdom that is to come. The kingdom has indeed been established, but has not yet become perfect. Until it does become perfect the Church remains a pilgrim Church, whose



aim will never be to foster the past but seek out new roads that religious people may travel in a new era.

But leaving well-trodden tracks and exploring uncharted ways is a precarious business which demands constant watchfulness, courage, and a readiness to veer and tack to suit the winds of different times and places. In trying to adapt Christianity to the modern world there may be a danger of merging the sacred with the secular in the interests of broadmindedness. But in face of the difficulty and the risk, modern Christians and their leaders must have the determination of St. Paul who, when overcome by obstacles, could write: ' . . . we do not lose heart . . . we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God' (2 Cor. 4:1-2). When we commend unchangeable truth to men and when our efforts to convince them fail, we must also be able to make our own attitude of Paul who in a moment of apparent failure wrote: 'we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself . . . but that was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead' (2 Cor. 1:8 f.).

### *BASIS FOR HOPE*

The particular raising from the dead which is the basis of all Christian hope is the resurrection of Jesus. Our faith and accompanying hope rest on the resurrection and glorification of Jesus which give us courage and security. We can say: 'We too believe, and so we speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus' (2 Cor. 4:13 f.). The raising and the glorification of Jesus was at the centre of the early *kerygma*, and the hope of sharing in his glorification was a source of joy to the hearers of the gospel. Paul in his writings returns again and again to the idea that 'Jesus is the Lord'. He is Lord not only of the believers but also of the whole world, and it is belief in this Lordship that gives to his followers in every age a confident optimism. Exalted in heaven he has not abandoned his Church, but remains al-

ways with her, guiding her in her search for truth.

Insecurity and doubt are symptoms of our age, and we Christians do not escape these things because they are part of human life. Some will say that we are even worse than unbelievers, because they consider our faith a flight from reality to a utopia created by ourselves. As men of faith we may not be able to answer all the questions that can be asked of us. Like the Jews of old we may be occasionally shaken by the question 'Where is your God?' But then our faith is 'the conviction of things not seen' (Heb. 11:6), something essentially obscure. But this obscurity of faith does not lessen the firmness of our hope. Rather it assures us that we do the right thing in risking all to follow Christ. St. Paul was aware of the element of risk involved in our act of hope when he wrote: 'whatever gain I had I counted as loss for the sake of Christ . . . For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse that I may gain Christ . . . That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings . . . that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead' (Phil. 3:8-11).

### *HOPE IN DISTRESS*

It is interesting to note that in this context of hope Paul mentions the sufferings of Christ and implies that it is through suffering that we will reach that life which is the object of our hope. This object is intangible and imperceptible, while the disappointments and sufferings of life may be only too real and visible. Yet our faith, and the hope it begets, enable us to look beyond the present moment's distress so that we are strengthened and encouraged by the realization that a bright future exists, even though we do not see it. So we hope and wait. 'If we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience' (Rom. 8:25).

Our Christian life will always be a struggle. There will always be a distance between present reality and what has been promised. Therefore we will never be satisfied in this world. We will be always on our way to something new and better. And we always know that no matter how much we brighten



up human life — and we will always have to do our best to brighten it up — and no matter how much the brightness of the world is reflected in the Church — and it

must be reflected in it — the believer will always be aware that the promised land is where it always was, on the other side of the far-away hills.

# Religious Conventionality

W. H. van de Pol

## MODERN COMMUNICATION AND ITS EFFECT ON RELIGIOUS CONVENTIONS

The word "conventional" is derived from the Latin verb *convenire*. This means to come together, to speak together, to agree, to be convenial to. A convention is a meeting, an agreement, a pact. And finally, convention also receives the meaning of "custom." When people agree on something or other and conduct themselves accordingly, such conduct slowly develops into custom. What in certain communities has been agreed upon will almost unconsciously determine and dominate the conduct of all those who belong to that community. In the long run, this will result in a conventional conduct and in conventional viewpoints, attitudes, motives, norms, and judgments.

Precisely insofar as such a complex has become typically conventional, those concerned are not aware of how the convention came about, possibly in the distant past. There is a tacit supposition that it has always been so, and that it will also have to remain so forever. Imperceptibly, the convention becomes something to which in everyone's opinion everyone will have to adhere, even if the reasons for it are usually hidden.

Conventions are found in every commu-

nity. It could even be said that it is precisely these conventions which keep the members of a community united and which distinguish the community from other communities with other conventions. Without any express motivation, the conventions of one's own community are held to be the only correct ones. No consideration is given to the fact that members of other communities think likewise about *their* conventions. As long as conventions are observed by everyone, and as long as no one calls their validity into doubt, the unity of the community is safeguarded. But at the very moment that one convention after another is attacked, there will be a manifestation of unrest, tensions, and conflicts within the community. Oppositions will develop, and this in turn will threaten the unity and continued existence of the community.

Conventionality does not occur only in the area of religion. There is a conventionality

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in fashion, in forms of conduct, and in other expressions of culture. We are, however, limiting ourselves here to conventionality in religion.

Not only Christianity, but all religions everywhere, and at all times, have been strongly characterized by conventionality. This is partly due to the fact that religion generally belongs to the masses. In this respect there is a remarkable difference between religion on the one hand, and philosophy and science on the other. There have been instances in which philosophers, explorers, and researchers had difficulty overcoming conventional insights which had become untenable in their respective areas. The facts and arguments, however, soon proved to be stronger than the conventional concept. Hence we find progress in science. Hence too, the danger which science presented to religious conventions.

Religion has always been the concern, not of individuals, but of communities, even to the extent that diverging opinions of individuals were generally regarded as suspect. Although the origin of most religions must be traced back to an individual founder who gathered disciples and followers around him, any one of these religions in the long run proved to be a mass-phenomenon.

### SOCIAL AND CULTURAL

Philosophy and science have always been the concern of individuals or of small groups. But religions have been confessed by an entire people, or even by many peoples who all belonged to one area of culture. Religion is a social phenomenon *par excellence*. Religion is also a cultural phenomenon in the sense that it has always arisen within a certain culture and has had a decisive influence on the further development of that culture or on the rise of a new culture. Therefore it is possible to speak of a Christian, an Islamic, or a Buddhist culture. The character and forms of these cultures can be understood only from within the religious context at the basis of that culture.

Among primitive peoples, religion is so much an ethnic phenomenon that it is obvious for all the members to belong to the

tribe's religion. The ties between religion and tribe, people, or nation have been so firm that during and even long after the religious revolutions of the sixteenth century, princes and magistrates tried to preserve the unity of religion in their country or city. The idea of a state or national Church is of primitive origin and continues to exist in conventional Christianity.

What does the conventional aspect of religion consist in? In general it can be said that religion is conventional insofar as the religious convictions and practices are held to be true and valid primarily because they were taught to be true and valid, either at home, at school, at church, or in the religious milieu in which a person grew up and to which he always belonged, and not because their truth and validity were grasped as a result of personal thought, personal experience, and personal conscience.

### THREAT FROM CONSCIOUS BELIEVERS

This of course does not exclude the fact that various religions and Churches have always had some believers who personally appropriated and practiced the religion of their milieu. In fact the conventionality of religion was often threatened by such conscious believers. These conscious believers, aware of their personal responsibility for their religious convictions and action, are the ones most seriously afflicted now that conventional Christianity is being undermined and attacked from so many sides.

The first and most noticeable characteristic of religious conventionality is the matter-of-factness with which one accepts and practices everything that is taught and prescribed. As soon as the slightest doubt arises about this matter-of-factness, conventionality is finished in principle. Whenever an individual in a religious society begins to reflect on the religious teaching and practice in that society, conventionality is affected for himself personally, and to that same degree he becomes a danger to the conventionality of the society. This does not necessarily mean that the teaching and practice concerned are also rejected. But they have lost their conventional character because they are no longer accepted as a matter of



fact, and for the sole reason that it has always been so taught and done.

The immediate consequence of the matter-of-factness with which in a given milieu certain conventional teachings and prescriptions are accepted is that they are considered immune to any attack. Should contrary facts and arguments be presented from without, they are *a priori* rejected as being unworthy of consideration. One does not wish to hear them. If one has any dealings with members of other religious groups, he limits himself to an attempt at convincing the other that he is simply wrong and that he should be converted.

### SECURE EXISTENCE

The principal function of religious conventionality is that it gives a feeling of rest, safety, and security to human existence. Now, human existence is in every man, precisely as man, characterized by an existential tension, concern, and uncertainty; but these are entirely or for the greater part silenced by religious convictions and practice. For in all religion it is a matter of man being in the clear with God (with the gods, with the universe, with reality). As long as a person's religiousness is in a conventional stage, nothing is so dangerous for his peace of mind as an attack and undermining of the conventionality of religion.

As long as possible, man resists disturbance of his peace of mind. He simply cannot bear being endangered. This explains why an attack on religious conventionality is usually countered, not with calm and relevant arguments, but with passionate vehemence and indignation. Psychologically it is an unmistakable sign of religious conventionality when parents, teachers, and priests react with infuriation and threats—instead of with control and well-considered arguments—to the insights, ideas, and conduct, or even open criticism of their children, pupils, and parishioners. This kind of impassioned sensitivity usually betrays a secret fear that one's own security, based as it is on conventionality, is endangered.

The nature and function of religious conventionality is also characterized by an invincible stubbornness. Conventions in other areas of life, such as fashions, manners,

ways of living, and so on, may be given up with reluctance, but this is done only because they are not related to the security a person needs in order to live in peace with his human existence as such. On the other hand conventionality in the religious area does have that relation, and thus there are reasons for the stubbornness which characterizes religious conventionality. It takes bulldozers to raze a stronghold of religious conventionality. In the long run, only an accumulation of irrefutable facts and arguments can fulfill this job.

Yet, on further reflection it appears that in spite of its stubbornness religious conventionality also has casual and arbitrary characteristics. This becomes obvious only when individual believers for some reason or other are taken out of their familiar conventional milieu. It often happens that people in such circumstances are spiritually and religiously uprooted unless they are capable of making the transition to the religious conventionality of their new environment.

### HARSH CONSEQUENCES

In such circumstances people experience that teaching and conduct can, in many respects, differ from what they have always heard and seen. What had, as a result of a commonly acknowledged and accepted conventionality, up till now been considered as self-evident and irrefutable, suddenly is seen to be less certain and secure than one had thought.

It is clear that the modern means of publication and communication, the frequent emigrations and widespread travel to all parts of the world, all contribute to the notion that convictions and conduct are not the only true and correct ones merely because they are valid in one's own personal environment. Communication with the world at large is not very conducive to the continued existence of conventional religiousness. It is therefore easy to understand why religious and ecclesiastical leaders have tried as much as possible to prevent communication between the believers entrusted to their care and "those of other convictions." It is precisely for this reason that in some circles objections are raised against



ecumenical *rapprochement*. As long as the faith and the life of faith are not based on personally acquired convictions there is indeed a danger in communication with the outside world.

Therefore a positive significance of religious conventionality lies in its function of preserving and protecting. As has been noted before, every religion has the characteristics of being a cultural mass-phenomenon. The percentage of those prepared and able to form their own judgment in religious matters depends on the level of culture that has been reached. A short time ago ecclesiastical authorities apparently did not think this percentage was very high. Individual efforts to reflect personally on questions which arose were suspect. Many "believers" still prefer to follow conventional ideas and practices. They evidently do not realize that conventionality is not quite a guarantee of the possession of the truth. For people with this attitude the shock is therefore all the more severe when firmly fixed truths based on "generally accepted" conventional grounds, are suddenly discovered not to be so firmly fixed at all.

### PROFIT AND LOSS

While it can be admitted that under certain circumstances and at a certain stage of culture, religious conventionality has a preserving and protecting function, this very function can also lead to very unfortunate isolation. What is taught and done within a given religious society is absolutized, and thus there is a total lack of interest, love, and understanding of the religious life and needs of those who do not belong to one's own circles. Narrow-mindedness and intolerance are inevitable disadvantages of any religious isolation. Here again, it is a matter of seeing the speck in the eye of another, but not the log in one's own.

Quite obviously, religious conventionality is a serious obstacle to fruitful religious contact between members of different religious societies. It seems to be just as self-evident that the other's position is unacceptable as it is that one's own position is beyond reproach. Not infrequently this becomes clear at ecumenical gatherings. Once such a meeting has been mutually arranged, those who

take part in it for the first time are hesitant and ill at ease. Such people often act in the supposition that they are defending personally acquired convictions, whereas in reality they are still caught in the shackles of an age-old conventional vision proper to the group they belong to. We do not always believe as personally and think as independently as we sometimes imagine. We are more conventionally determined and limited than we realize. We are the products of our environment, children of our time, servants to one or another religious and theological trend. Without being clearly conscious of it, we all live, believe, and think from some religious or spiritual isolation.

### DIALOGUE IMPEDED

Precisely because it is so extremely difficult to effectively break out of this isolation, it is a rare occurrence to establish a true dialogue between representatives of different religions or Churches; it is rare that people really listen to each other, that they really allow themselves to be informed, corrected, and enriched by what the other has to offer. Usually it is a matter of a monologue, during which each of the parties waits for the moment that the other capitulates and acknowledges that he is wrong or not altogether right. Mutual suspicions prevail that the other is not sufficiently open-minded or sincere. Each party loses sight of the fact that they, themselves, are rather incapable of delivering precisely what the other is so easily expected to produce. When it comes right down to it, we are all part of "blind humanity."

It would be a mistake to maintain that intellectuals in general and religious leaders in particular are less conventionally bound than those who may be counted as belonging to the popular masses or the masses of the faithful. It is generally known that intellectuals outstanding in their particular science or research frequently are no less conventional than anyone else in the religious area.

As far as religious leaders are concerned, they usually consider it their duty to defend and maintain at any cost those conventional convictions and norms which are held in the community entrusted to their care. Usually



they do this by strongly emphasizing the immaturity of the masses of the people. They distinguish between the "knowledgeable" and the lay people. The knowledgeable, whether they be priests, ministers, theologians, or engaged in pastoral care, are the ones in authority; the lay people are those who must be guided, instructed, and exhorted, and who are to accept all this in due submissiveness.

A growing self-awareness of the lay people not only constitutes a danger to the conventional exercise of authority, but is also a threat to the conventional concept of religion. In our days we are witnessing a conflict between maturity and authority, and an immediately related conflict between maturity and conventionality.

No one will be foolish enough to think that we have reached the point where all adult people are also mature and capable of forming independent judgments in all areas of life. Such a point will, in fact, never be reached.

### *GROWING MATURITY*

At the same time, it is an established fact that everywhere and in ever increasing tempo a growing percentage of the population is in the process of reaching true maturity. Illiteracy is practically non-existent in all fully developed nations. All persons have enjoyed primary and secondary education and have had sufficient training to understand that judgment and action require prior reflection. Advanced education is received by more and more members of the younger generation. Through press and pocketbooks, through radio and television, everyone can constantly be informed about significant events everywhere. People with sufficient intelligence, interest, and energy want to be conversant with current affairs, to reflect on questions which arise, and think out possible solutions. Even where people depend on the judgment of experts they still like to appropriate the knowledge made available and the counsel given.

On the level of politics this growth in maturity has long since resulted in an acceptance of democracy, at least in the free countries. Today it is no longer possible to demand that a person sacrifice his intellect

and conscience, his experience and expert knowledge, in order to submit unconditionally to any authority in any field whatsoever. This is true also from the religious point of view. If ecclesiastical and religious authority is to continue to function properly, it will have to be adapted to the growing maturity of the faithful.

However, with this growing maturity and self-determination of the faithful, it is no longer possible artificially to maintain conventional notions, practices, and conduct by pressure from above if their meaning and necessity are not seen by seriously thinking people. A growth of maturity goes hand in hand with an increase in the undermining of conventionality.

In this respect a development is taking place which cannot be stopped. This development will have a determining influence on the structures of authority in any Christian Church or community. The number of the faithful who would unconditionally believe and accept things without reflecting on motives and arguments is dwindling. They cannot continue to believe simply because the Bible, the Church, the pope, the council or the synod, the pastor or the minister says so. The legitimacy of these authorities is now called into doubt, but people rightly expect answers to questions, and insights into the meaning, the value, the acceptability, the plausibility of what is taught and prescribed. In other words, there will be more confidence in the legitimacy of claims to authority if that which is taught and proclaimed really addresses the entire person more strongly and more personally.

### *SOIL FOR PREJUDICE*

Finally in this analysis we must speak of the inevitable but detrimental connection between conventionality and prejudice. It is clear that the different characteristics of conventionality are closely interrelated. Aloofness and seclusion promote narrow-mindedness. When these qualities are joined to immaturity one finds a predisposition to prejudice. However, the deepest source of prejudice lies in the fear of a possible attack against conventional convictions and practices, which might in turn result in a loss of religious security.



# Books Received

Death: — And Then What?  
Marc Oraison  
*Newman*. \$3.95

In a short volume of 122 pages, this original thinker and able writer touches briefly on six aspects of death. He presents "one man's attempt at communication with . . . his fellow men who like to discuss and reflect together." These pages represent some of the insights that he would contribute to the discussion. He treats topics like the naturalness of death, death and science, and the Christian vision of death. Without elaborating his thoughts at length, he joins death to birth and sexuality; attempts to demythologize death; and examines the divergent reactions of people when another dies. From a rich background of study and clinical experience, he intertwines theology and medicine. His method is somewhat unique. But his reflections are suggestive and fruitful. He quotes the English humorist who said, "Do not take life too seriously, you will not leave it alive." He would have believer and unbeliever reflect on "the relative value of life in time," and on the awesome happening that can be the gateway to eternal life in the risen Christ.

Faith: Can Man Still Believe?  
Louis Monden  
*Sheed*. \$5.95

Father Monden teaches at Louvain and won a wide audience for his previous books: *Sin, Liberty and Law* and *Signs and Wonders*. These volumes established him as a scholar who could distill the best in his studies and convey his insights with readable clarity. The present book is in the same vein—although some pages, because of their concern with epistemological issues, require close reading.

The author is aware of the inadequacy

of much in the apologetics of the not so distant past, and the great strides made in recent decades to correct these deficiencies. A convinced believer himself, he is concerned with the man who finds difficulty in believing and endeavors to find the key to his agonizing dilemmas. He recognizes that "contemporary thought is anti-metaphysical" and is convinced that "if our faith seeks a confrontation with man as he thinks today, it should be willing to face the questions suggested by phenomenology."

While summarizing the pertinent thoughts of some of the most influential thinkers of our time, he is alive to the permanent need of the Christian to be "always prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you." And he suggests ways whereby the Christian can become "the Stranger who comes up to the passer-by of goodwill and through the word of the proclamation and the breaking of the bread opens up the road for recognizing with certainty that Christ lives and that he remains with us all days until the completion of history."

Man To Man  
Douglas J. Roche and  
Bishop Remi De Roo  
*Bruce*. \$6.95

Mr. Roche is editor of the liberal Western Catholic Reporter and Bishop De Roo is progressive prelate of Victoria in Canada. They held a significant series of conversations over several days which were recorded on tape. Gary MacEoin did an excellent job of editing the tapes and writing the introduction. The result is a most unusual report on some of the important questions asked by the laity today and the replies of a bishop manifestly dedicated to renewal.

The issues in this unique dialogue are wide-ranging. One of the topics discussed in lively fashion is concerned with the basic

essentials of Christianity as distinguished from secondary matters only remotely related to authentic holiness. Sex, marriage, birth control and clerical celibacy come in for frank exploration. The sacramental and social aspects of marriage are well done. And there is a treatment of the status of women and the changes that modern culture demands in the traditional view which regarded women as inferior.

Along with its valuable content, this book is significant for its recognition of the desperate need of open dialogue between laity and Church leaders. Mr. Roche is acutely alive to the disturbing problems of the layman—conscience, the search for community, clericalism—and the effect they have on the Church's witness to the world. The bishop reflects the unenviable position of today's church leaders: on some questions they do not have final answers; other questions have to be fielded deftly because of possible misinterpretation. This book should be widely read, particularly by those who exercise authority in the Church.

Living in Hope  
Ladislaus Boros

*Herder and Herder.* \$4.50

If you often put down a newspaper with the grim reflection "things are even worse than I thought," the writer has a message for you. He contends "that if a Christian is to witness to God's love and greatness, there is perhaps one thing above all others which he must do today, and that is to demonstrate to his fellow men that there is joy, happiness and hope—that life is good and worth living."

The scholarly, Hungarian Jesuit maintains that the Christian is committed to the renunciation of selfish, personal fulfillment, to generous giving of self, and being close to others so that he may contribute to the gradual transformation of our world into a place where rewarding human life becomes increasingly a reality. This he thinks is the opportunity and grace of the present day follower of Christ. He thus dwells, with penetration and simplicity, on the eschatological aspects of our earthly life, drawing out many of the implications of Christ's revelation: belief in God and our legitimate

aspirations; and the significance of death and of a heavenly goal.

In His Presence

Louis Everly

*Herder and Herder.* \$4.50

In this short book, the eminently popular author endeavors to remind us of the continuous and vital presence of God. There are some seventy-two succinctly treated topics; usually with an eye-catching, thought-provoking title, which aims to set the reader off on fruitful reflections of his own. Most chapters run to less than a page; the longest is about five pages. The subjects treated cover a wide range: prayer, contemplation, liturgy, humility, poverty, predestination and the love that creates. Some chapters offer brief theological speculations on the puzzling matter of Christ's human consciousness; on the mystery of redemption and the consolation for sufferers than they suffer with Christ; and the resurrection as the assurance that love still lives.

J.T.M.

## GUIDE

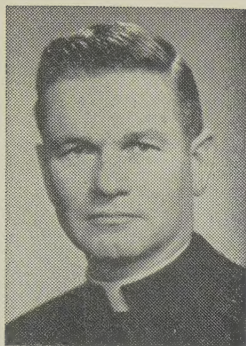
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## GUIDE

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# Guide Lights

## CATECHESIS OF ADULTS AGAIN . . .

In recent years the crisis in the Church has tended to dominate the religious interest and attention of persons both in the Church and elsewhere. Under such circumstances normal pastoral patterns, including the catechesis of inquirers, have been subjected to searching criticism and in some cases left by the wayside. This is understandable considering the uncertainty which plagues so many people today. However, the need of man for God is perennial and it will not forever be stopped by this kind of obstacle. God's ways are not man's ways and presumably his Spirit is at work in the lives of countless persons impelling them onward to a more conscious awareness of faith. The confusion of events and messages that is characteristic of the Church today may for a while prevent any developing relationship between such an inquirer and the Church. However, this cannot go on indefinitely and the demands of faith will be met in many cases in spite of the most confusing obstacles. Many perceptive observers believe that in the near future increasing numbers of people are going to pay less attention to the sounds of crisis and insist that the Church help them deal with some very elementary matters of faith. If this happens then once again familiar pastoral responses will be called for and the catechesis of adults will be an important element of parish life.

## DESIGNING THE CATECHESIS . . .

In preparing to respond to such overtures a good place to begin is with an inventory of what can reasonably be anticipated about people's needs and what the Church has available to service them. We do not address ourselves to people in a

vacuum. There are important things that we already know about them and these can serve as valuable points of departure in designing programs. For example, we know that something real is happening to them as they come to the Church. We know, too, that they do not fully understand what it is because almost none of them has had this kind of faith experience before. We know, too, that the emergence of faith is a process and while it may be experienced by the person as something sudden and spontaneous, nevertheless it has a history that probably parallels a good bit of his previous life. Because this is a process we can anticipate that the inquirer has different and sequential needs, and that in the relatively brief time in which his catechesis will occur several distinct and important needs must be met. Experience should have taught us that no one instrumentality is going to be adequate to meet all of these. And finally we know something generally about how adults learn. We know for example that the learning achievement of adults is less in the straight lecture learning situation than in almost any other. This says something important about the kinds of format that should be employed in the catechesis of adults. We know, too, that learning is not a matter of filling a void with information. Rather it is a complex process by which a person organizes a whole range of thought patterns, perceptions, assumptions, attitudes, feelings, and skills that are the product of experience and then tests this organization against the problems of living.

## AVAILABLE RESOURCES . . .

Having seen how much important information we already have about people who come to the Church the next step is to look at what is available in the Church by way of response. Without going into detail there



are at least three broad areas of resources available wherever the Church is: 1) The Christian people themselves and their experience of God. This is a resource which has not received enough attention. All men of faith have in their own lives an important experience of God which has much to offer by way of illumination to those who are undergoing their initial experience of him. In their prayer, witness and worship the Christian people have a depth of experience that can be the subject of fruitful dialogue with those who are coming to this for the first time. 2) The life of the local church. This is a similar resource but on a more organized and functional scale. Here would be included the liturgy, the educational apparatus and the apostolates of the parish. All of these things are expressions of the Church's faith and represent some of the communal ways in which that faith is lived. By relating to them the inquirer gains a lived experience of the Church that both complements and extends on another level the fruits of the dialogue mentioned above. 3) The whole tradition of the Church. This includes the spiritual heritage of 2000 years of Christianity, e.g., scripture, the Fathers, the great spiritual writers, the doctrinal teaching of the Church, art and architecture, prayer, etc. Not all of this, of course, can be used in every situation nor is this desirable. However, the resources available within the tradition of the Church are inexhaustible and there are always specific things to be found there which are very meaningful to all kinds of people. Attentive listening to the needs of the inquirer often helps point a direction where specific parts of the Church's tradition will find a welcome echo.

### THE CATECHUMENATE AS VEHICLE . . .

The specific vehicle by which all of the above elements are incorporated in the parochial setup is the catechumenate. It is the entire local church in relationship to the inquirer. It is not any one single activity of the Church nor is it a special program. It is the Church as she presents herself in her entirety to those who are coming to faith. The catechumenate includes first of all the Christian people, both clergy and laity, since they are fundamental to the Church. In the catechumenate they are present through prayer, articulating their faith in dialogue with inquirers, and simply being and doing their Christian thing. The communal life of the local church is present through her liturgy and her apostolates. The

prime focus of liturgy should be the sacrament of baptism, as it is administered in stages. Pushing this deeper into the life of the local church, it would be advantageous if baptism occurred during the Sunday Eucharist celebration so that the event would be truly and obviously a part of the life of the local church. The apostolates of the parish should be opened wherever possible to participation by those undergoing catechesis. In this way they receive a natural apprenticeship in the life of the Church and an important part of their Christian faith will be learned by doing.

So far as the treasures of the Church's tradition are concerned, — many of these will of course find a natural place in the catechesis itself. Thus for example, scripture, the historic teaching of the Church and the Christian life of prayer will be part of the normal catechesis of adults in the catechumenate. Discussion in small groups with members of the local parish will encourage catechumens to reflect upon their own life experience and search out its meaning in relationship to their emerging faith. The whole effort of the catechumenate should be in the direction of attempting to incorporate as fully and as naturally as possible into the life of the Church those who are coming to her faith.

### THREE BASIC RESPONSES . . .

No two people come to the Church from the same situation. Their needs while similar are not exactly the same. However, in her long experience the Church has learned to consider at least three basic responses to people who come in quest of faith. The first of these is to address herself to human questions about meaning, — the meanings of life, death and transcendence. Her response may simply be to help people recognize their own searchings in terms of these questions. Secondly, she responds by offering the long experience of Christianity as one interpretation of their meaning. In presenting her gospel she attempts to clarify the questions and to bear witness to her faith in such a way that it truly illuminates them. Finally, she seeks to lead the responsive inquirer to an encounter with the living Christ. At this point they are both in the hands of the Spirit and the Church's response is as much to Him as to the inquirer as she delicately assists him in guiding the catechumen into his new life within the people of God.

JOSEPH V. GALLAGHER, C.S.P.